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SUICIDE SQUAD
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SUICIDE SQUAD:
THE PHOENIX GAMBIT
PART 4 OF 4

THE PHOENIX GAMBIT: PART FOUR

BLACK QUEEN'S MATE

JOHN OSTRANDER/KIM YALE, writers
GEOF ISHERWOOD, artist
TODD KLEIN, letterer
CARL GAFFORD, colorist
DAN RASPLER, editor

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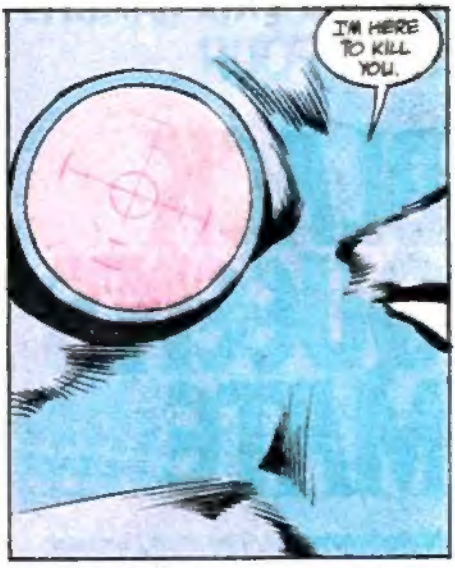
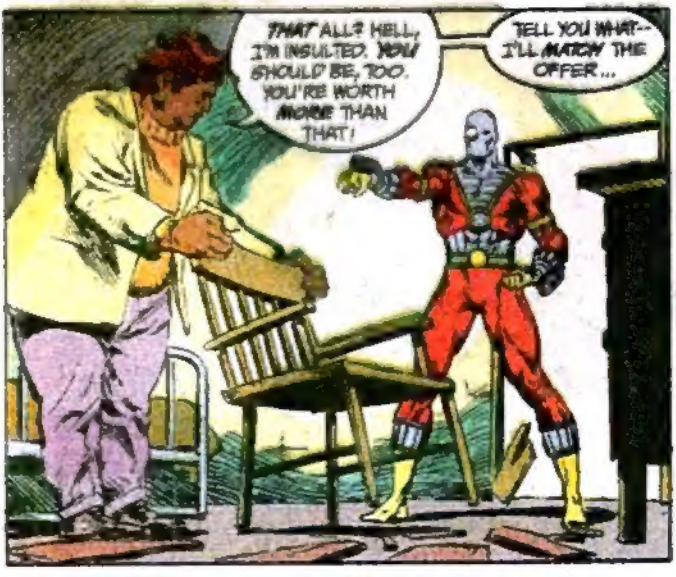
HELLO, FLOYD. WHAT BRINGS YOU TO SCENIC VLATAVA?

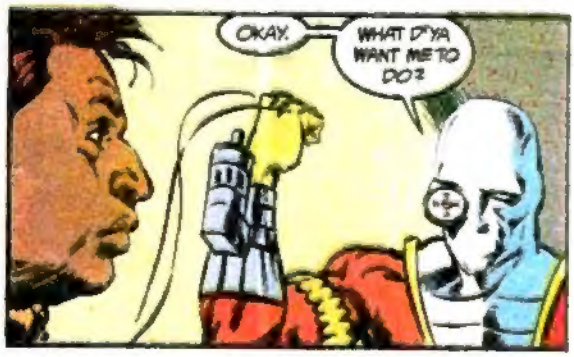

I'M HERE TO KILL YOU.

NO, YOU'RE NOT. OH, THAT MAY BE WHY YOU WERE SENT HERE, BUT IF YOU WERE REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT IT, YOU'D HAVE DONE ME ALREADY. YOU'D HAVE DROPPED ME FROM ACROSS THE STREET.

HOW MUCH THEY PAYING YOU TO DO ME?
A HUNDRED THOU.


THAT ALL? HELL, I'M INSULTED. YOU SHOULD BE, TOO. YOU'RE WORTH MORE THAN THAT!
TELL YOU WHAT-- I'LL MATCH THE OFFER...

...PLUS A DOLLAR...TO WORK FOR ME AGAIN.


OKAY.
WHAT D'YA WANT ME TO DO?

DEPENDS. WHO HIRED YOU TO DO ME?
WILLIAM HELLER.
HUH. HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM SINCE HIS WILLIAM HELL SHTICK. HE'S BEHIND ALL THIS, IS HE?
OH YEAH.

HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT GOING BACK AND DOING HIM INSTEAD OF ME?
NO DIFFERENCE TO ME ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. NEVER REALLY LIKED BILL, EVEN WHEN WE WERE GROWING UP. AND HE'S BEEN HAPHAZARDLY TRYING TO GET ME KILLED.
OKAY, SO YOU GO BACK AND SHOOT HELLER...

MEET ME IN PARIS THROUGH MARD McCABE'S STUDIO. I'LL HAVE YOUR MONEY FOR YOU. MAYBE SOME MORE WORK.
RIGHT. SEE YA LATER.

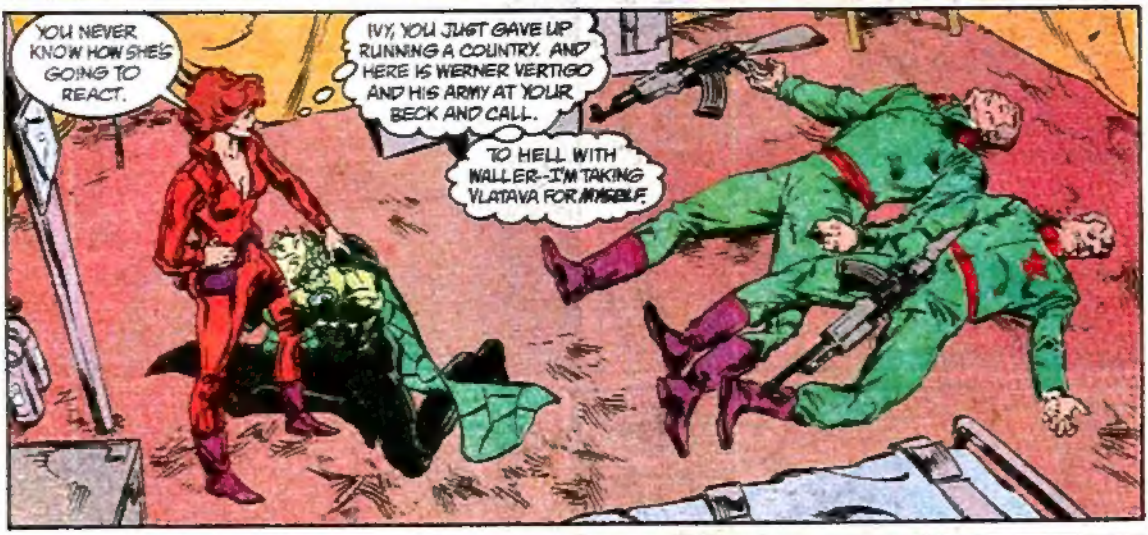
I'VE GOT TO START DEALING WITH A HEALTHIER BUNCH OF PEOPLE.
CREEEEAK!

CAMP OF COUNT VERTIGO'S FORCES.
<THE ANCIENT BLOOD AND LINEAGE OF MY ANCESTORS SHALL BE VINDICATED! THE GUTTERS WILL RUN WITH THE BLOOD OF MY FOES! I AM AN AVENGING ANGEL, AND I STRIKE WITH RIGHTEOUS FURY!>
<SO NOW HE HAS RELIGIOUS DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR. AN AVENGING ANGEL-- HOW RICH! THE MEN WILL FIND INSPIRATION IN KNOWING THEY ARE LED BY A MAN TOUCHED BY GOD!>
<VERTIGO'S DIVINE MANIA IS A SIDE EFFECT OF THE DRUGS WE'VE ADMINISTERED TO HIM, AND A DANGEROUS ONE, AT THAT! WE'RE PLAYING A CHEMICAL RUSSIAN ROULETTE WITH HIS BRAIN, CAPEK!>
<THE PATRON'S GOALS ARE WITHIN HIS GRASP; IT MATTERS LITTLE IF THE COUNT ENDS UP A DROOLING IMBECILE. AND MY SPIES HAVE INFORMED ME BATMAN HAS BEEN CAPTURED BY THE RED SHADOWS. COME!>
<ON WINGS OF GLORY...?
YOUR QUEEN ARRIVES CROWNED WITH LAUREL.
4

HAIL, COUNT WERNER VERTIGO! ACCEPT THIS TOKEN OF YOUR BELOVED COUNTRY'S ESTEEM.
ANGELS AND MINISTERS OF GRACE DEFEND US! BE THOU A SPIRIT OF HEALTH OR GOBLIN DAMNED?
SHAKESPEARE. HOW QUAINT. TAKE MY KISS, DEAR COUNT. FIRST SPOILS OF THE CONQUERING HERO.
WAIT-- I KNOW YOUUUUUUU...
YES. I'VE BEEN TOLD I HAVE THAT KIND OF FACE.
IVY HERE. THE COUNT IS IN MY CONTROL.
NO, IT WAS EASY GETTING IN-- EVEN LIGHT COULD HAVE FOUND AND INFILTRATED VERTIGO'S CAMP. I SIMPLY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THE SOVIETS HAD SO MUCH TROUBLE FINDING THE BASE.
5

YOU WILL HAVE YOUR LORD OF MISRULE ON SCHEDULE. IVY OUT.

SHOULDN'T SNEAK UP ON A GIRL LIKE THAT!


YOU NEVER KNOW HOW SHE'S GOING TO REACT.
IVY, YOU JUST GAVE UP RUNNING A COUNTRY. AND HERE IS WERNER VERTIGO AND HIS ARMY AT YOUR BECK AND CALL.
TO HELL WITH WALLER--I'M TAKING VLATAVA FOR MYSELF.

RED SHADOWS HEADQUARTERS IN VLATAVA.

<HERE, COMRADE. NOW HE IS TRULY HELPLESS!>

IT WILL BE MOST REWARDING TO ANALYZE THIS BELT. NATURALLY I AM CURIOUS AS TO ITS CONTENTS. ALMOST AS CURIOUS TO DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE FOR BEING IN VLATAVA AND YOUR INTEREST IN THIS BUILDING.
I WILL NOT PLAY GAMES WITH YOU. THERE SHALL BE NO PRETENSE. WE WILL LOOK EACH OTHER IN THE EYE AND I SHALL SEE YOUR FEAR PLAINLY.
REMOVE THE COWL
G'DAY, MATIE.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

HEADS UP, STONEMAN. TURN AROUND SLOWLY, WITH YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM.

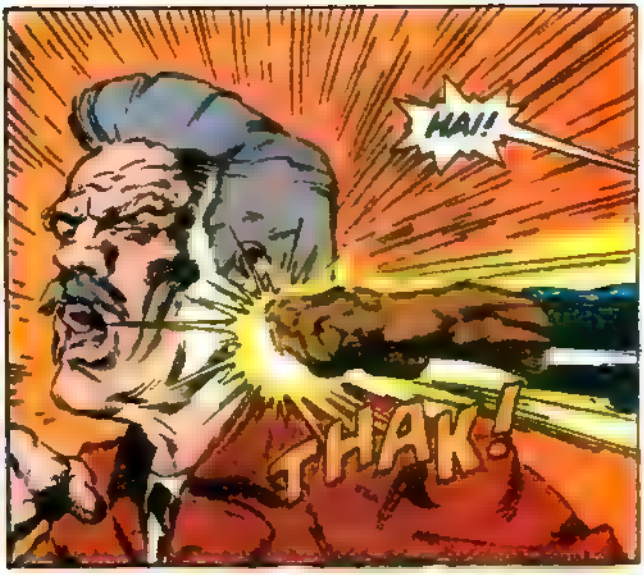
INSIDE.
LOOK, THIS ISN'T NECESSARY...!
INSIDE!

DON'T MOVE, GENERAL.
THUNT
FWUT

FWUT
FWUT
KRAK
THUNK
B-BATMAN! THANK HEAVENS YOU WERE HERE! BUT I THOUGHT--
--I WAS IN VLATAVA. THAT'S WHAT THE REPORT SAID, DIDN'T IT? HERE-- LET ME DO THAT.
A CROSS CUT INTO THE CASING, FILLED WITH CYANIDE. A KGB TRICK. BUT THESE AREN'T KGB AGENTS, ARE THEY, STONEMAN?
9

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT--!
COME OFF IT, STONEMAN. THERE'S A LEAK IN STEEL'S OFFICE AND YOU'RE IT. THE CARGO MANIFESTS FOR THE MILITARY CONTRABAND VARGA SHIPPED TO VLATAVA LED RIGHT TO YOU.
THOSE WERE PLANTED! I'VE BEEN SET UP! BETRAYED! JUST LIKE VARGA!
IS THAT RIGHT?
YES! VARGA FOUND OUT THAT HE AND VLATAVA WERE BEING USED AS PAWNS TO FORCE A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN OUR COUNTRY AND THE SOVIET UNION--ONE THAT WOULD BRING RUSSIA TO ITS KNEES!
HE BALKED... BECAME A LIABILITY...!
SO YOU FED HIM TO THE WOLVES--TO A STEEL WOLF, TO BE PRECISE. SET HIM UP FOR STALKOVOLK TO FIND!
NOT ME! I DIRECTED--AND SO THEY SET ME UP. BUT THOSE GUYS WOULD'VE KILLED ME AND MADE IT LOOK LIKE THE KILLER!
I'LL HAND YOU OVER TO STEEL FOR SAFE-KEEPING, STONEMAN. HE'LL DECIDE HOW HE WANTS TO PROSECUTE YOU.
I WANT THE NAME OF THE PERSON BEHIND ALL THIS. AND YOU WILL TELL ME.
10

VLATAVA
<BLUE TRINITY HAS CAPTURED BATMAN ZASTROW STILL WISHES YOU TO COME BACK TO HEADQUARTERS AT ONCE >
<NAY-- IF YOU HAVE HIM? NEVER MIND MIGHT AS WELL WASTE MY TIME BACK THERE ASOUT HERE.>


HA!!
THAK!

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TRUE INVULNERABILITY. STRUCK WITH ENOUGH SKILL AND STRENGTH, EVEN A STEEL MAN CAN BE BROUGHT DOWN.

PERHAPS BUT BEING DOWN IS NOT BEING OUT.
KKKK

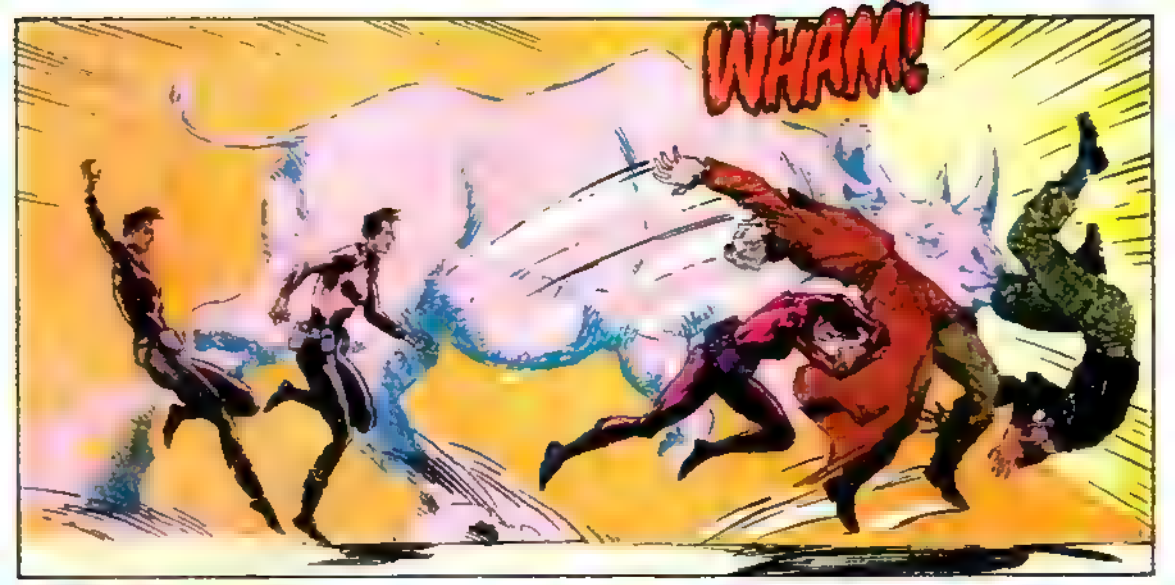
MY EYES!
SHUM
KRAK

WOOSH!

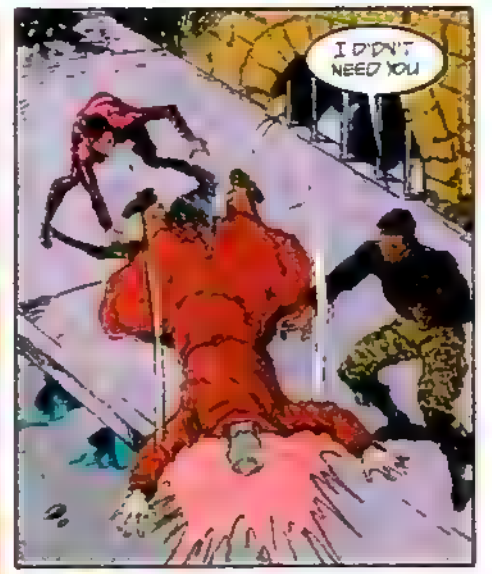
TOO BAD YOU HAD YOUR CHANCE BUT I CAN SEE AGAIN.

YOU
WILL
GO
DOWN!

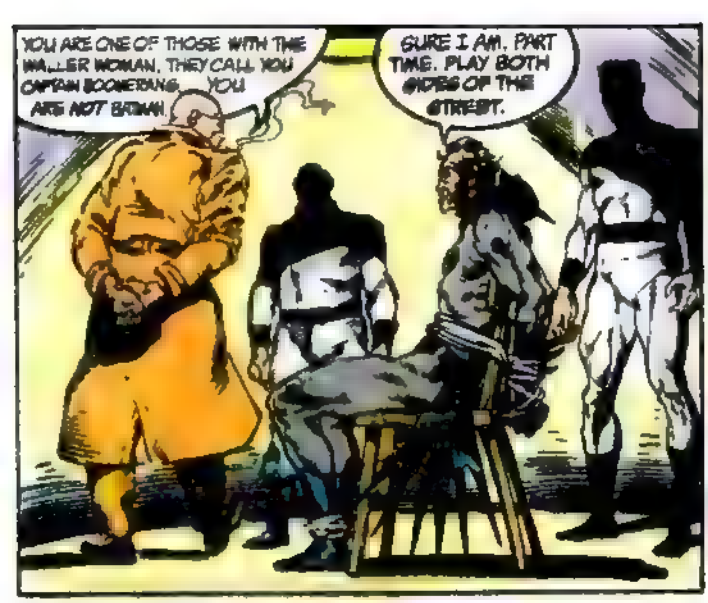
YOU START TO ANNOY ME, LITTLE GNAT. TIME TO SWAT YOU.
THUP


WHAM!

THOOM!
GA!!


I DIDN'T NEED YOU

WELL, I DON'T NEED THIS.
WHATEVER STEEL DID TO YOU IS NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO YOURSELF AND I WON'T LET IT TWIST ME LIKE IT HAS YOU.
GOOD-BYE, BEN


YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE WITH THE WALLER WOMAN. THEY CALL YOU CAPTAIN BOOMERANG. YOU ARE NOT BATMAN.
SURE I AM. PART TIME. PLAY BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET.

I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT.
I'M HIS SON. BATMAN JUNIOR. BATBOY.

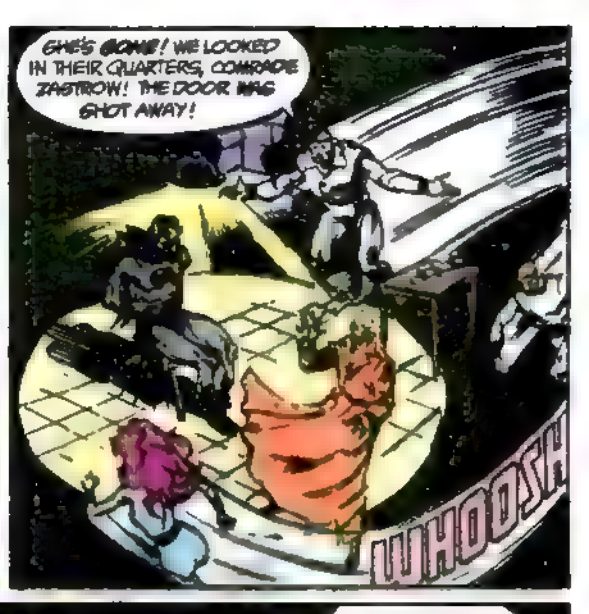
YOU ARE DECOY OF SOME KIND.
TOO RIGHT, MATE. STRENTH, I HAD TO LURK ON THAT ROOF FOREVER BEFORE ONE OF YOUR MOB NOTICED ME.

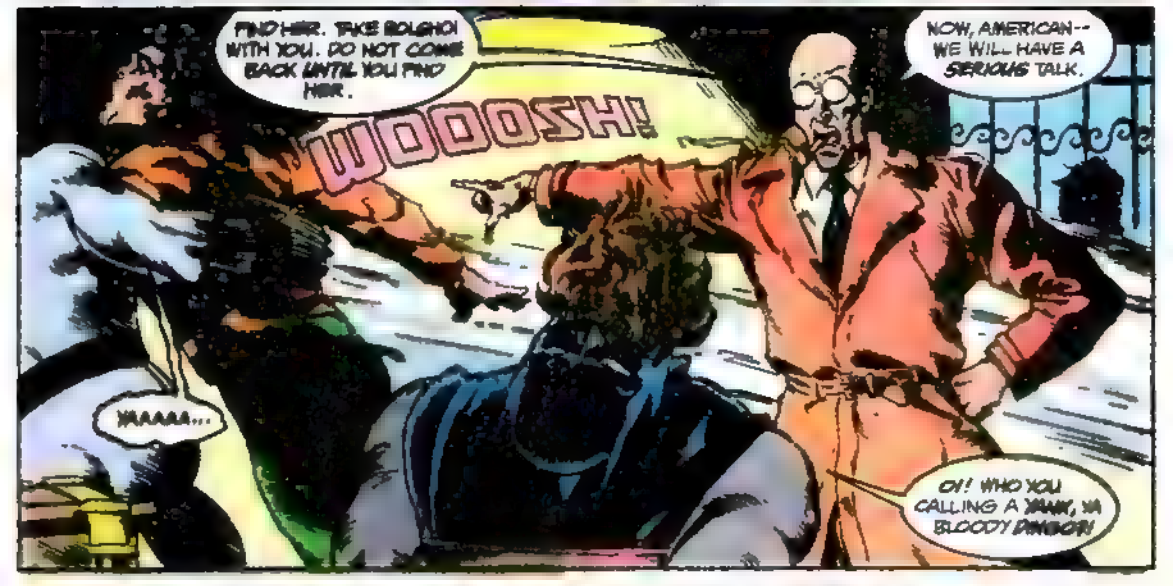
KRAK!

DO NOT JOKE. I DO NOT AMUSE. WHAT IS WALLER PLAYING AT?

DON'T KNOW. I'M JUST ONE OF THE PEONS! DO YOU TELL YOUR PEOPLE EVERYTHING?

BLUE TRINITY. BRING THE WALLER WOMAN TO ME.
WHOOSH


SHE'S GONE! WE LOOKED IN THEIR QUARTERS, COMRADE ZASTROW! THE DOOR WAS SHOT AWAY!
WHOOSH


FIND HER. TAKE BOLGHOI WITH YOU. DO NOT COME BACK UNTIL YOU FIND HER.
WOOOSH!
NOW, AMERICAN-- WE WILL HAVE A SERIOUS TALK.
YAAAAA...
OI! WHO YOU CALLING A YANK, YA BLOODY PINKO?!

IF YOU WANT A SERIOUS TALK, COMRADE--YOU BETTER HAVE IT WITH ME.
BOOMERSHUTTS GOOD FOR ANNOYING PEOPLE, BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT.

<MADAME WALLER IS NOW WITH ZASTROW, EXCELLENCY. YOU WISHED TO BE INFORMED...>
<YES, YES. GIVE ME THOSE AND GO AWAY. I ALONE HEAR THIS >

EXPLAIN WHAT YOU ARE PLAYING OR I KILL YOUR ASSOCIATE HERE AND NOW.
BLOODY HELL! DON'T GIVE HER STRAIGHT LINES LIKE THAT, MATE!

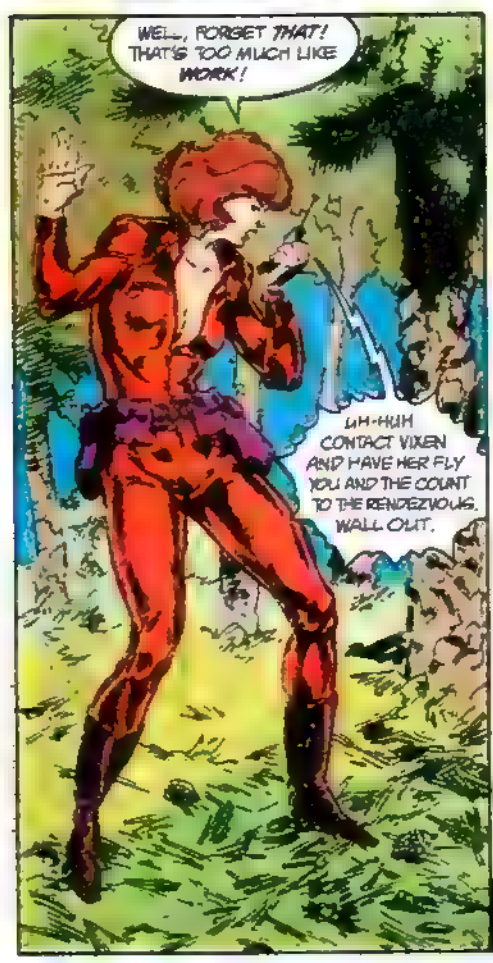
LET'S PUT OUR CARDS ON THE TABLE.
RIGHT FROM THE START, ONE PERSON HAS BEEN CONTROLLING THE SITUATION HERE IN VLATAVA. I'VE GOT THE NAME OF THAT PERSON WRITTEN DOWN HERE. WANT A LOOK?

<THE NAME! READ THE PAPER ALOUD, FOOL!>

AN INTRIGUING THEORY YOU CAN PROVE THIS, OF COURSE.
IN A COURT OF LAW? NO, OF COURSE NOT. BUT I CAN MAKE A GOOD ENOUGH CASE TO SATISFY MY EMPLOYERS--OR YOURS.
I WOULD PREFER TO HANDLE THE MATTER MYSELF.
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT. OKAY BY ME--PROVIDED I GET WHAT I CAME AFTER.
WHICH IS?
WE'VE NEUTRALIZED VERTIGO SO YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY REASON TO STAY. TAKE THE RED SHADOWS BACK TO MOROCCO.
KALIBAN WILL BE DISPLEASED!
IN ABOUT TEN SECONDS, KALIBAN'S GOING TO BE PAST CARING.
:gurk!:

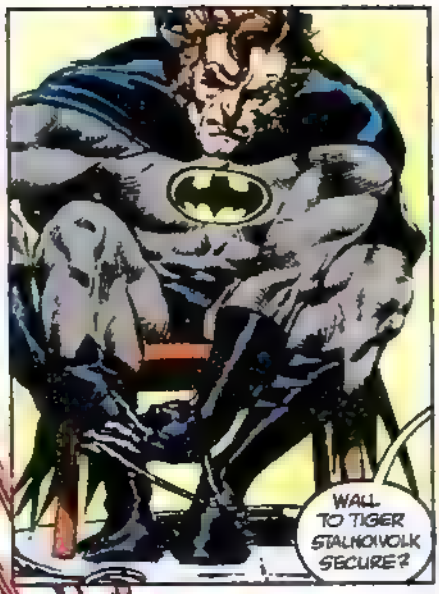
IF YOU HAVE NEUTRALIZED VERTIGO, THERE MAY BE NO REASON TO STAY IN VLATAVA, AS YOU SUGGEST
GRANNY KNOTS? WHO TIED THIS-- BOLSHOI?
WALL TO IVY. YOU GOT VERTIGO SECURE?

WELL, YES -- BUT THERE'S A CHANGE OF PLAN. I'VE DECIDED TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE COUNT AND HIS ARMY AND RULE VLATAVA MYSELF.
GIRL, HAVE YOU CHECKED VLATAVA'S GALP RECENTLY? YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO REBUILD IT BEFORE YOU CAN PILLAGE IT


WELL, FORGET THAT! THAT'S TOO MUCH LIKE WORK!
UH-HUH CONTACT VIXEN AND HAVE HER FLY YOU AND THE COUNT TO THE RENDEZVOUS. WALL OUT.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I THINK I MIGHT KEEP YOU IN THRALL, COUNT CUTIE. THAT COULD PROVE VERY INTERESTING.
ONE OTHER THING-- STALNOVOLK HAS TO ANSWER A MURDER CHARGE BACK IN GOTHAM. MADE A PROMISE TO A MAN WITH POINTY EARS.
THERE DO YOUR OWN DAMN FEET, HARKNESS

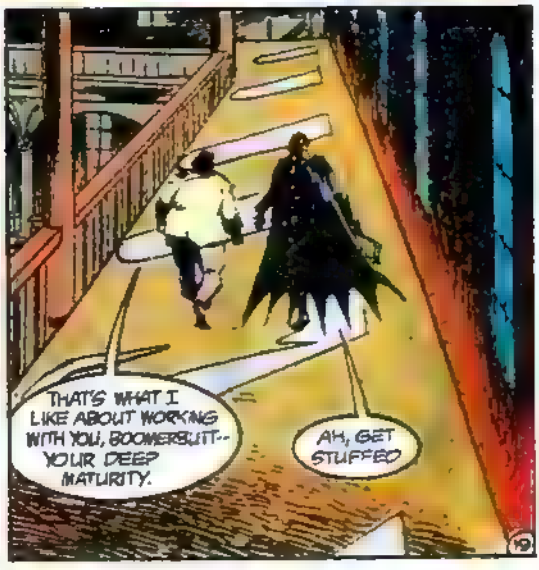
BY ALL MEANS PROVIDED, OF COURSE, YOU CAN GET STALNOIVOLK TO GO.


WALL TO TIGER STALNOIVOLK SECURE?

WRAPPED UP AND READY FOR SHIPMENT, WAITING AT THE RENDEZVOUS. WHAT'S KEEPING YOU?
THAT'S THAT, THEN.

NOT QUITE!
KRAK!

WHY'D YOU DO THAT?
HE HIT ME FIRST. A BLOKE HITS YA, YA DO HIM ONE IN RETURN. AUSSIE RULES.


THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT WORKING WITH YOU, BOOMERBUTT-- YOUR DEEP MATURITY.
AH, GET STUFFED

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- TWELVE HOURS LATER...
LAWTON! EVERYTHING'S BLOWN TO HELL! DAMN IT, MAN-- WHY DIDN'T YOU GET WALLER?
SHE GAVE ME A BETTER DEAL TO COME BACK AND GET YOU.
CLOP!
KRASHHH!
FORGET IT, DEADSHOT! HELLER'S MINE! THE LAW WILL DEAL WITH HIM!

THE LAW CAN WAIT. I WAS HERE FIRST.
BLAM!

IT'S OVER, HELLER. FORGET THE GUN.

OH? HE HAD A GUN?
HE'LL LIVE--PROVIDED WE GET HIM TO A HOSPITAL BEFORE HE BLEEDS TO DEATH.

I KNOW. WALLER SAID TO SHOOT HIM. DIDN'T SAY TO KILL HIM.
AND IF SHE SAID TO KILL HIM, YOU'D HAVE DONE THAT.
YEAH.
TELL ME, LAWTON--YOU HAVE ANY MORAL CODE OF YOUR OWN?

WHAT FOR? NOBODY HIRING ME HAS ONE.

NEXT: GRAVE MATTERS

SUICIDE NOTES

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This column will be about SUICIDE SQUAD #39 and #40.

Dear Dan,

Last issue you wrote that #39 would be the "final curtain," but I didn't expect this. What a shocker! Goodbyes, the Lon quickly offed, Amanda jailed—examples of the SUICIDE SQUAD action I've come to love.

I can't wait to see what changes John Ostrander and Kim Yale have planned next. Glad I don't have to wait a year.

Melissa Page
236 New Salem Loop
Nortonville, KY 42442

* * * * *

Dear John and Kim:
Re: Suicide Squad #39

An excellent character piece! This issue raised the question of loyalty in all its scenes: Major Force demonstrating his loyalty to Amanda and the Squad willingly, Mari's loyalty to Ben, the "non-powered" part of the team demonstrating it to each other and (occasionally) to Amanda, Amanda forcing the loyalty of Ivy, Floyd, and Ravan and, of course, the Lon attempting to gain the loyalty of the drug users of the country. Of course, Amanda's loyalty is to the memory of her family (and, thus, her desire to destroy crime that would prey on the family structure) and not to the government and, thus, her actions against the Lon were the only ones she could possibly take. In many ways, she is similar to (gasp) the Batman (who, of course, will be making a guest appearance in the next issue). Both are reacting violently against crime based on a violent crime against people they loved. Interestingly, Amanda's approach is extremely violent and public, while Batman's is somewhat less lethal and private. This, to me, stirs up the memory of the quote "those who are not willing to sign their critical letters are not worth listening to in the first place."

Good luck to Amanda: she continues to be among the strongest female characters in comics today and I'd hate to see her succumb to the moniker of the team!

Thanks for listening!

R. Kevin Doyle
1630 Kewalo St. #108
Honolulu, HI 96822

Thanks, R., but I think Batman "signs his letters" in his own special way.

* * * * *

Dear John, Kim, Dan, and Bob,

As much as I love Amanda, her actions in issue #39 cannot be condoned. Her wholesale slaughter of the entire Lon was completely unjustified, as was her release of two criminal sociopaths and a thugee terrorist onto the streets of the unsuspecting public. True, she did put an end to a major drug cartel, in turn perhaps saving many more lives than she put at risk, but I have a problem with both her motivation and her orchestration of the handling of events. While I suspect that some of her motivation clearly stems from the fact that the Lon was pure scum, threatening to turn the streets of our nation into a nightmarish battle-zone, I submit that a major factor in her decision to murder Bocor, Mambo, and Damballah was out of pure, bloodthirsty vengeance. I do believe that the Squad is the most important thing in the Wall's life, and when it was taken away from her, something inside her snapped. And, I say "taken away from her," because I think she truly did believe it was *hers*. The power she so desperately craved and eventually obtained finally corrupted her. When she lost the Squad, she also lost sight of the fact that she merely *worked* for the law, *she* was *not* the law. That became her downfall, and I hope that during the year she is incarcerated, she'll have time to reflect on this, and emerge a much stronger person with more self-control. After all, we learn from our mistakes, and she made a doozy!

Major Victory did *not* make a mistake, however, when he put Stoneman in his place. I gather Bill Vickers learned a lot about himself and his fellow Squad members during his little trip to Apokolips. I'm glad he emerged from that fiasco alive, and I'm thrilled that he was humbled by the experience, in turn changing him into the man we always knew he could be. I hope that when the Suicide Squad re-forms, Major Victory once again becomes part of it, and this time plays a more pivotal role.

On a lighter note, page 7 positively had me in stitches! Ward and June, eh? If they name their baby "the Beav," ship them off to Arkham, will ya? And it's hilarious to see Dr. Light's ghost roaming through Belle Reve. I hope we continue to see him popping up in the background every few issues or so—as long as he doesn't start talking to someone. He's the kind of guy who should be seen and not heard.

I'm very excited and optimistic about the new direction of the Squad. Here's hoping you keep up the fantastic work you've been doing (although I have no reason to think otherwise), and I pray that "The Phoenix Gambit" brings up sales of this marvelous title. This is one book that sincerely deserves to succeed and I hope it finally receives the recognition it so richly deserves.

Take care, and I'll be talking to you again soon.

A sincere fan,
David J. Harrington
210½ Broadway
Fort Edward, NY 12828

Some interesting insights into Amanda's actions in #39, David. Anyone out there want to respond?

* * * * *

Dear Dan,

The SUICIDE SQUAD is dead! The body is cold and they are digging the grave. OK, not quite. But in issue #39 you came pretty close. I was shocked that Amanda Waller turned herself in. If I had written the story, Bronze Tiger would have brought her in. One minute Amanda is a plotting matriarch, the next she is an inflexible dictator. Amanda is the most complex character in the medium.

The Squad may not be the most powerful super group, but their attitudes are genuine. People think the X-Men are outlaws. Ha, what a joke!

The artwork was great again, and has been since issue #21. This should be one of my favorite covers of 1990. SUICIDE SQUAD was my favorite comic of 1989. The last 20 issues have been incredible. They make the first 20 issues seem average. Is there going to be an annual this year?

Derek Lewis
12175 13th St. #19
Yucaipa, CA 92399

P.S. IVY, KISS THE MAN GOODBYE.

No annual this year, Derek, but thanks for writing.

* * * * *

Dear Dan,

Having been a SUICIDE SQUAD fan for many years, I felt it time to write. And what better time to write than with the construction of the new Squad. May it live long and perform its appointed duties.

At first, I was somewhat disconcerted by the news of the "destruction" of the Squad in issue #39; however, after reading "The Phoenix Gambit" Part One, I was well pleased. The story, art, and even the characters were well handled. I was somewhat skeptical as to Batman's participation in the reformation. Was he there to sell the book or was he there with legitimate interests? Well, obviously, a little of both. But still, I was pleased to see Batman's inclusion not a mere marketing ploy. He's there to play off Amanda Waller, the toughest nut the world has ever seen (but you do have to love her for it).

Ostrander needs no compliments; his record speaks for itself. *Grimjack* and politics are merged to form Deadshot. Isherwood, however, deserves some praise. His art is stupendous and quite fitting for the tone of the book. This man draws Batman better than Jim Aparo. Hell, give Isherwood Bats and see if he can turn the Caped Crusader around. What I'm trying to say is that Isherwood's art is one of the best things about the book. I'm interested in finding some of his other works. Thanks for the Squad.

Yours sincerely,
Brandon P. Bostt
Salt Lake City, Utah

P.S. Tremendous poster. Let's see one a little bigger for next year.

Thanks, Brandon. Spread the news! Geof Isherwood's most recent jobs were on Marvel's Conan The King *(#50-55) and on* The Nam; *which he inked from #15 to #41.*

* * * * *

Dear John, Kim, Geof, Todd, Carl, and Dan,

Well, I must say, guys, I'm impressed. SUICIDE SQUAD #40, being the first issue of the series I've read, really took me by surprise!! I had no idea how good this title is! I'll be honest and admit that I only bought it because Old Pointy Ears was in it, but rest assured I'll be adding the SQUAD to my monthly list.

From the writing and art point of view, this title's a dream. Good, slick writing, combined with crisp artwork. I like it. One thing puzzles me, though: from the letters page I get the impression that Rick Flag is dead. Is this so? How did he die? Anyway, I must dash! I'm off to buy 39 back-issues and a few annuals. Catch you later!

Gary Stephenson
20 Magnolia Way
Shildon, Co. Durham
England

P. S. Loved that poster ...

Gary, Rick Flag, former Squad C.O., is dead, having nuked himself and a group of terrorists in issue #26.

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Dear John and Kim,

"One year later"?

Have you guys been having lunch with Keith Giffen or Tom and Mary Bierbaum, by any chance?

In all honesty, I've thoroughly enjoyed issues #39-40 because you have observed one of today's foremost unwritten rules in comics: never keep things predictable. I love being surprised by events in a good story, and "The Phoenix Gambit" has knocked us readers on our collective .... "Ashes" was a great story, guys!

Amanda has gained even more depth as a character now that she's wiped out the Loa, allowed three dangerous criminals to go free, and spent a year in jail. (It's obvious she's spent the time there thinking, but don't tell me she's wasted a year just sitting on her bunk where we left her last issue!) She's become more shrewd and tougher than ever, one of those "women you wouldn't want to lock dental braces with," as Berke Breathed's "Outland" strip says. Now that the Squad is "freelance," and she's calling the shots, Amanda alone is worth the price of admission. Her given terms for future members of the Squad will make this team even more exciting and dangerous than before! Also, the reasons the new Squad is being pulled together is not some hackneyed plot, but a threat of world-shaking proportions. I'm as intrigued by this as I am by the people involved. Good going!

Batman's major involvement in this storyline is also a surprise when you consider how much he and Waller hate each other. Pages 5-18 were like having an extra issue of BATMAN this month, well-written and well-illustrated. If any of the Bat-titles is ever in need of a new writing team, John and Kim, I'd say you two should be DC's first choice. You showed us the Darknight Detective's methods of deductive reasoning with such clarity and style, it was exciting to see him track down the Steel Wolf!

Okay! Okay! You've won me over with Geof Isherwood's artwork with this issue, his cover, and his beautiful fold-out poster! His style does indeed fit the serious tone of the book—this is not Saturday morning cartoon stuff. Again, the close-ups are especially impressive, and I do like him best when he inks himself. Count Vertigo and Sarge Steel were nicely rendered, too!

I see from the poster that Poison Ivy is returning (which makes me happy 'cause I enjoyed seeing her in action last issue), along with the Bronze Tiger, the Vixen, Capt. Boomerang (?!), somebody who looks like Ravan, and Deadshot. Stalnoivolk will make an interesting addition, to say the least. Does the fact that most of these characters appear sans costume mean that you wish to move this title farther away from the super-hero/super-villain genre? I agree that the capes and cowls are not what make this book exciting, but the book's method of resurrecting characters from DC's file of obscure comics is what does. Well, you yourselves know what you have up your sleeves, so I'll happily read along. There are still some dangling plot threads left to resolve—Punch and Jewelee's baby, Dr. Light's ghost ominously appearing last issue, and the Ifrit, to name a few.

Yours till the phoenix arises,
Neil Ahlquist
1100 Washington St. NE Apt. #2
Minneapolis, MN 55413

Stay tuned, Neil.

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People,

Great! Great! Great! This is how the SUICIDE SQUAD was meant to be!! Mean, lean, clean, and unseen. Even Amanda is leaner (eat your heart out, Oprah!)

Actually, I always felt that Batman would work better with the Squad than with the loopy Justice League. That poster in the middle of SUICIDE SQUAD #40 says it all. The guidance of Batman, the mind and leadership of Amanda, and the accuracy and cunning (albeit askew) of Deadshot, and the diversity of super-talent in the group itself. (They look like a mutated version of the 1960's British television show, "The Avengers" ...)

Take care,
Lon Wolf
2118 Ryan's Run East
Maple Shade, NJ 08052

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Well, it's good to know that everyone liked the poster insert in #40, and that both our regular readers and our "speculators" are enjoying this current storyline. It's music to my ears ...

AND THERE SHALL BE A NEXT ISSUE BOX ...

Well, as you all know, the "Phoenix Gambit" has been wrapped up. Didn't think we could do it in one issue, did you? So what do we do now? Our opening sequence in #44 bears a resemblance to the opening of #39 (and we all know what happened in #39), so next issue promised to have some big surprises. Actually, next issue's surprises are going to be really small. Be here in four weeks to find out what *that* means.

At any rate, SUICIDE SQUAD #44 will be drawn by everyone's best pal, LUKE McDONNELL (pencils and inks) and will concentrate on the Wonder from Down Under, our very own Captain Boomerang. John has been working with Australian comics writer David M. DeVries to get the Aussie dialects just right, and if you've ever been intrigued by our favorite slimy, foul-mouthed, irascible, bitter, cruel, funny-hat-wearin' Boomerbutt, then you don't want to miss SUICIDE SQUAD #44! It's called "Grave Matters" and it's terrific G'day, mates!

—Dan Raspler
Editor, but only just